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SUCCESS STORY

Mixed Community Celebrates New Park



Lebanese and Palestinian children play in a new playground developed by an OTI partner in the southern Lebanon community of Burghliyah.

“Due to the success of the project, the community now trusts the municipality much more and they have started to bring more of their needs to our attention.”

***—Muhammed Youssef
Representative of
Burghliyah Municipality***

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November 2008 – The mixed Lebanese-Palestinian community of Burghliyah in southern Lebanon has been celebrating. Four hundred local residents turned out to inaugurate a community park that is the culmination of several small-scale infrastructure improvements, including a new water well and a pedestrian walkway.

The park, part of a larger project funded by the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), provides a common meeting point for Lebanese and Palestinians, as well as a social outlet for youth in an area where youth-friendly spaces are limited. “We’re coming every day now to play here with our friends,” said 9-year-old Ali.

Implemented by American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA), the park is the outcome of a participatory process that fostered citizen-government interactions and involved intensive consultations with a wide spectrum of stakeholders.

Lebanese and Palestinian residents were an integral part of the planning process. The idea for the park arose during a series of meetings with children and youth who, according to ANERA Country Director Rob Mosrie, “decided together what shape the park’s characteristics would be.” The process “strengthened intercommunal relations and trust,” he said.

In addition, ANERA, with OTI support, used similar approaches to introduce community improvements in four mixed neighborhoods of Tyre, an area that has seen an influx of Palestinian refugees since the 2007 conflict that destroyed the Naher El Bared camp in the north. The influx has put additional pressures on cash-strapped municipalities and increased tensions over the distribution of scarce resources. The participatory processes are helping reduce conflict by empowering marginalized communities to use institutional channels to express their grievances.

Burghliyah residents are applying the skills they learned through the project to better advocate for their needs, and the municipality is responding with greater community outreach, a commitment to maintaining the upgraded infrastructure, and efforts to leverage other donor funds for additional improvements.